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Public Monuments and Outdoor Sculpture



In ever-increasing numbers, government agencies and public organizations are embarking upon the cleaning and repair of the sculpture and commemorative monuments that have been placed in their care. These efforts

have been inspired, in part, by Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!), the nationwide effort to inventory all sculpture in the public realm and elevate the preservation needs of these resources in the public mind. Other sources of inspiration have been the highly publicized conservation projects

for well-known monuments like the Statue of Liberty and, more recently, the 1993 conservation of the colossal bronze, *Armed Freedom*, atop the dome of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

The National Park Service and other preservation-based institutions have correspondingly seen a dramatic increase in public requests for information on the appropriate steps to plan and implement monument conservation projects and programs. But not all treatment programs have been well-informed or well-conceived. Many have been quick-fix attempts to carry out dramatic sculpture “facelifts” and have resulted in the permanent damage of the very cultural resources that their owners had hoped to preserve. It seemed to us, and to Susan Nichols, who directs Save Outdoor Sculpture! and co-edited this issue of *CRM*, that a collection of articles presenting views, research, and experiences of those who commission, curate, and study public sculpture and monuments would be both useful and timely.

The impetus to preserve sculptural monuments often begins with a recognition of their social, cultural, and aesthetic value. Therefore the first articles presented here consider the roles of sculptural commemoration, past and present. Professor Sally Webster shares with us the early stages of her ongoing research into the history and implications of the Hall of Fame, the collection of

nearly 100 bronze busts that forms a pantheon of the nation’s heroes as determined through popular election. As a companion piece, we include Michael Panhorst’s discussion of the compelling monument in Kalamazoo, Michigan, erected in 1989 to memorialize both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement that was his life’s work. The close proximity between King’s time and our own helps to make the meaning of his monument more accessible. But what about monuments created in the distant past? Richard Putney considers this question and offers a very creative solution in his discussion of the course he team-taught last spring at the University of Toledo. Through various means, he immersed his students in the ethos of the 19th century and turned them from students of the 1990s to monument designers of the 1890s.

Questions about the civic role of a fictional hero arise in Danielle Rice’s essay, Rick Nichols’ *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial, and Tony Auth’s cartoon on the public controversy that swirled around the placement of the bronze portrait of Rocky Balboa atop the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Planning for the long-term preservation of sculptural resources begins with compiling an inventory to serve as the basis for condition assessments that, in turn, will inform whatever decisions are to be made about conservation and maintenance. Since its establishment in 1989, SOS! has attempted, with much success, to inventory the nation’s publicly accessible outdoor sculpture and to raise awareness about the need for its care. Susan Nichols provides a five-year progress report on SOS! Through the writings of correspondents in England, Australia, Finland, and Argentina, we can also glimpse survey and assessment efforts being carried out in other parts of the world.

Inventories and computerization of their products enables one to both perceive connections and trends in commemoration, and to gain insights that may not have been readily apparent. The American Monuments and Outdoor Sculpture database (AMOS), a national sculpture survey, revealed that many copies of Theodora Alice Ruggles Kitson’s *Hiker* existed throughout the United States. This realization led to the research



Daniel Chester French and Henry Bacon, Dupont Memorial Fountain, 1921, marble. Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. Photo by the author.

Cover Photo: Monument to General William Tecumseh Sherman, 1903, Grand Army Plaza, 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, in New York City’s Central Park. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, sculptor; McKim, Mead and White, architects. Photograph ca. 1925, courtesy of Phyllis Ellin.

Carrying out good research into the cultural and social history of sculpture and monuments, compiling good inventory information, and understanding the mechanisms of deterioration are all necessary if one is to make good decisions about conservation treatments and the long-term care of these important cultural resources. The articles that follow in the next section all consider various aspects of sculpture and monument management. The first of these provides a general historical view

Exhibitions can be valuable tools for enhancing public awareness and support for conservation of cultural resources. Through photographs and interpretive text, Judith Nyhus recreates a portion of the recent exhibit on continuing efforts to conserve the important collections at Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site.

NPS-MARO organized two week-long national courses for collections managers in the preservation of outdoor monuments: in Washington, D.C. and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 1991, and in Chicago, Illinois in 1992. With the co-sponsorship of SOS! and the help of local host organizations, the office will conduct smaller-scale, regional courses designed to reach a wider audience. In a similar vein, AIC has recently published its *Guide to the Maintenance of Outdoor Sculpture*, a brief but comprehensive treatment of issues involved in planning and implementing long-term outdoor sculpture maintenance programs.

The strong popular and professional interest in outreach programs like these suggests that support is growing for sculpture preservation. Research and development of better treatment and maintenance techniques, coupled with concerted efforts to educate collection owners and managers on the need for well-conceived maintenance programs, offers the best hope for the long-term survival of a vulnerable and irreplaceable body of artistic works.

Diane Buck's article discusses long-term commitments to preserve other outdoor sculpture collections, with an emphasis on the care of recent works. New sculpture, often fabricated with a wide array of materials and structural systems, presents